

An Interview with

ANTHONY C. ZINNI



Speaking to marines in Egypt, Bright Star '99/'00.

U.S. Central Command (Norman M. Cornier)

Challenges in the CENTRAL REGION

JFQ *What basic considerations underpin your theater strategy?*

Zinni Our theater strategy is built around the mission of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). It has four elements. The first is obvious—providing access to the energy resources of the region, which is a vital national interest. The second element

is something often overlooked—the growing commercial significance of the area. The pattern of global trade is shifting from east to west. Investments are flowing into the region because of its geostrategic position. The third is the number of maritime choke points in the region, such as the Suez Canal and Strait of Hormuz. We must ensure these passages remain open to communication and trade. Fourth, there are issues of stability—the Middle East peace process, extremism, and other concerns that could destabilize the region and reach beyond it. This is more than

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terrorism. And there are other concerns, not exactly national interests, but things that matter in the long run—especially humanitarian and environmental issues.

JFQ *Are there any serious threats to the region at present?*

Zinni Like all theaters we have threats—Iraq and Iran, each posing different kinds of problems. Iraq is a short-term threat that involves a strategy of containment—which works. But any strategy takes patience and also has its ups and downs. Iran could become a greater long-term threat, but it could change dramatically under the influence of moderates who are making small but steady advances. If they succeed in gaining control from hard liners in some critical areas—weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the direction of the military, and support for terrorist groups—it may be time for us to look at Iran in a new light.

JFQ *How does South Asia figure into your theater strategy?*

Zinni It's a concern for us, perhaps the biggest, because of nuclear proliferation. India, which is not in the CENTCOM area of interest, has the bomb while Pakistan, which is in our region, also has a nuclear capability. Iran is close behind them. Certainly Iraq would go nuclear if it could. Israel, which is not in our area but just outside it, probably has a capability. This region, unlike the rest of the world, seems to be headed in the wrong direction in terms of WMD. I'm worried that friendly countries may opt for these weapons as a means of deterrence. To my mind, WMD will be a major threat, something that must be reversed under a non-proliferation regime.

JFQ *What other transnational issues do you see on the horizon?*

Zinni We worry about extremism, something that involves more than just the threat of terrorism. There



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is a movement, a new *jihadism*, that is coalescing around extremist groups. Its origins can be traced to Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden and others have brought extremists together through hostility to the West as well as other countries in the region. They are finding common support that makes this situation dangerous. Moreover, they are going beyond simple acts of terrorism. They are getting involved in major conflicts in Central Asia, such as Chechnya in the Caucasus. Also these groups are attempting to establish extremist states.

JFQ *Why are you particularly concerned about the environment?*

Zinni Down the road we are likely to find major environmental problems caused by demographic trends. The signs are not good in terms of population explosions that could depreciate economies around the world. Some nations that rely on one source of revenue, such as petroleum, could be faced with economic disaster. There are heavy demands on water supplies in the region, and water will be a serious problem in the future.

There is depletion of the environment, and pollution. Both poor management and cultural reasons prevent some states from getting a handle on environmental issues like the availability of water resources in the Middle East.

JFQ *How does engagement contribute to overall regional stability?*

Zinni Engagement is the first leg of our strategic vision. Its goal is developing professional and responsible militaries in democratic states and states that are undergoing democratization—military organizations that are capable and well-led. We work to create potential coalition partners. We do not have a NATO or formal security agreements with countries in the region. Desert Storm was fought with an ad hoc coalition. Today we work through a series of bilateral relations. We are like the glue that holds things together in the area—it is a constant job. We enjoy informal relationships with many nations and foster potential coalition partnerships, not only in the Persian Gulf—and in places like



Landing at Udairi
Range in Kuwait,
Eager Mace '99–1.

*we are the only unified command
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13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Brandon P. O'Brien)

Egypt and Jordan—but in Africa. There is much promise throughout the region, but realizing it requires a more complex, sophisticated program of engagement.

JFQ *How does your command contribute to U.S. diplomacy?*

Zinni We support diplomatic efforts and foreign policy initiatives by establishing close personal relationships with leaders across the region. Not only senior officers, but civilian leaders as well. In our part of the world there is not always a separation between political and military leadership.

In fact, they can be one and the same, like Pakistan. You will find military leaders who are also members of royal houses or other elites and thus, in dealing with them as officers, one is moving in political circles. So my official visits to many countries begin with a call on the heads of state, at their insistence. Such relationships not only help in military-to-military contexts, but also in broader contexts which influence U.S. foreign affairs.

JFQ *What about the CENTCOM role as a combatant command?*

Zinni Besides engagement we have warfighting goals. They form the second leg of our vision. We are

warfighters, and we must be prepared to respond. We have a family of twelve plans that are serious, each one real. In addition, we are the only unified command that literally goes to war. CENTCOM is a deployable headquarters. When we have to pack up our gear—communications, computers, and the like—we aren't going off to fight from Honolulu or Stuttgart. That pulls us in two directions and puts a double burden on our staff, coping with strategy and policy—traditional unified command responsibilities—and operational, even tactical, issues.

JFQ *What do you mean by development, the third leg of your strategic vision?*

Zinni It's a way of looking to the future. Broadly speaking, it seeks to better the command and the environment. It's what militaries within the region can do to better the environment, help each other, share experiences, and respond to environmental crises. We also help Americans and others better understand the region. We train our people on Islamic and Arabic culture and other aspects of the area. We worry about command climate and the quality of life of our personnel. Moreover, we work with U.S. Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) and others on doctrine development.

JFQ *How does CENTCOM perform its mission without assigned forces?*

Zinni While it's true that we do not have assigned forces, that's an advantage and a disadvantage. The advantage is that we own little infrastructure in the region. There are no U.S. bases. There are few headquarters or assets in place. Our forces largely operate from host nation facilities. Those nations also support forward presence. Last year their support—food, fuel, and water—amounted to over \$300 million (\$500 million in the previous year). The disadvantage is that we must ask other commanders for forces. Sometimes that is unplanned or upsets planning. But we try not to put unnecessary demands on other CINCs or the services. Three things combine to meet our needs: forward presence forces, pre-positioning, and earmarked CONUS alert forces.

JFQ *What would you change in the unified command plan (UCP)?*

Zinni Recent UCP adjustments expanded our area of responsibility (AOR). We have been assigned a fourth subregion, Central Asia. No one who sets out to revamp the way that this plan partitions the world can satisfy all requirements imposed by a given region. In other words, looking at AORs in purely military terms and considering critical questions like span of control, the number and size of militaries in the region, and the scope



of potential crises that can be reasonably allotted to one CINC, one kind of approach emerges. But if you look at CENTCOM in strictly cultural terms, it might make sense to circumscribe the entire Islamic world—the Greater Middle East or however you want to refer to this overall region—which suggests another approach. And if you contemplate our AOR in terms of natural resources, such as apportioning scarce supplies of water or arable land in some sort of equitable way, you would come up with another approach to UCP development.

JFQ *Would another approach to the region satisfy everyone concerned?*

Zinni Geographic commands are not delineated in the same way that the Department of State, Office of the Secretary of Defense, or Joint Staff organize themselves to deal with various regions of the world. CENTCOM interfaces with four different regional bureaus in the State Department, and desk officers on the Joint Staff are not aligned with the current UCP. Looking at international organizations, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council or the Organization of African Union, other approaches to the region emerge. Moreover, if you were to cast the region

in terms of an *energy* command—an approach that was considered in the past—in addition to the Persian/Arabian Gulf, you would want to include the Caucasus and extend the region to Nigeria in West Africa.

JFQ *Do such geographical anomalies compound your problems?*

Zinni There is no perfect solution to defining any AOR. For example, would it be advisable to have both protagonists in a conflict in the same region? Should India and Pakistan be incorporated under one command? Should Israel and its Arab neighbors come under one CINC? Obviously, there are pluses to having all parties included in a single unified command. On the other hand, such an arrangement could completely overwhelm any command. In the case of CENTCOM, the Indo-Pakistani dispute or the Middle East peace process could totally consume us.

JFQ *Do the CINCs exert real influence over what the services do?*

Zinni There are a number of myths out there. One is that everything that CINCs do is bad—joint exercises, requirements, and so forth. We're seen as adding pressure to the services, operational and personnel tempos, and

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Briefing reporters
on Desert Fox.



CINCs to accept this idea, but I can envision this officer as my representative, developing a joint integrated priority list after consulting with every CINC.

JFQ *Would JFCOM have to arbitrate requirements among CINCs?*

Zinni First of all, I don't think it would take much arbitration. If you take requirements today, you probably will find about an 80 percent match. If you look at the concerns of CINCs—issues like theater missile defense and protection against WMD—there's a lot of consensus at the top of the list and maybe a few unique ones at the bottom. One CINC may have a particular issue because he lives in a different environment. But certainly the highest priorities and the common ones get attention. Whether we make an issue number one and PACOM makes it number two or three, you will proba-

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constrained budgets. Congress recently cut our exercise budget. And what was cut? Joint exercises. Over the last four years we have had our exercises cut by a third. The assumption is that we put a strain on the system. But what is lost when joint exercises are cut? Engagement, coalition building, preparation for joint warfighting, that's what you really lose.

JFQ *What's your assessment of the joint requirements process?*

Zinni We do not have a definitive voice in the process. While the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC) gives us a voice at the table, we don't have a vote. For example, if one service is about to put in a communication system around the world and needs theater injection points, that service will provide them. And when a service looks at its infrastructure in Europe or the Pacific, where will those injection points go? Not in CENTCOM. We only have forward presence forces that rotate in and out of the region, no

bases or fixed infrastructure. No Ramstein or Okinawa. So the ability of CINCs to directly influence resources is not as strong as people think. But given the personalities in place today, the service chiefs and the Chairman and Vice Chairman, we are taken seriously and our voices are heard. If we make our case, the services give us every consideration.

JFQ *How would you fix the joint requirements process?*

Zinni I would like to see the commander in chief, Joint Forces Command (JFCOM), become our guy at the JROC table—with a vote. I think he should represent CINCs on joint doctrine, joint requirements, and joint testing, as well as joint development in a broad sense of the term. Obviously, he should be the joint integrator. He can handle joint experimentation, joint deployment, and related matters. Perhaps I'm more willing than other

bly find that the vast majority of such items are considered major priorities. So I don't think that there would be any need for a lot of arbitration.

JFQ *How do you see this role for JFCOM working in practice?*

Zinni JFCOM should be the bridge between CINCs and service chiefs. I would not want that to increase the power of CINCs at the expense of service chiefs, because everything tends to be seen in that context anyway. It's always some sort of a zero sum game and that's wrong. First of all, this is a great collegial group who work very closely together. In discussing engagement at the last CINCs conference I found that the service chiefs were interested in what we're doing because their resources are involved. And we mulled ways to improve things. For example, the services could meet some training requirements within the context of a joint



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training program or exercise, or vice versa. If I draw forces from PACOM, could my joint mission essential task lists (JMETLs) be met by an exercise in Korea? The answer is yes. There are certain units that come to me and also go to Korea, so an exercise like Ulchi Lens could meet my requirements. That is one way that JFCOM could actually help us be more economical. And there are certain functions that all CINCs perform that could be done by one. Consequence management is one example. If there is a WMD event, we pull together disparate and highly specialized agencies. Why should each CINC develop a separate capability? Why not establish a deployable JFCOM consequence management capability that could meet the requirements of any CINC?

JFQ So you see JFCOM balancing command and service interests?

Zinni JFCOM must not only address CINC requirements, it must grasp service requirements and harmonize them. I don't want to get into the business of influencing the kinds of tanks, ships, or planes that each service buys. That isn't our business. I do think that when a program has joint applications we must ensure that interoperability is taken into account. The services have a grip on doctrine. Bringing joint doctrine together is difficult.

If it is tied to programmatics or if the service doctrine centers are involved, it's difficult to get an agreement. The service components are forced to work together in the unified commands. Developing the joint force land component commander concept was done by our components, not by this headquarters. It was done by all the services and produced a workable solution. The current joint doctrine system makes the services adversaries because they are competing for resources, attention, and recruits.

JFQ What is the role of the Joint Chiefs in operational matters?

Zinni They have a say in how service assets are employed. CINCs brief them on contingency and war plans which, in turn, the chiefs vote on. Can the chiefs trump CINCs? How do we provide input to the interagency process? We are notionally the most knowledgeable players in our regions on operational requirements. We are the warfighters. How do we input a warfighting perspective to the National Command Authorities? Is there a formal process? CINCs are not directly part of the interagency process. We communicate with the Secretary of Defense through the Chairman. We have dual obligations to Congress and the Secretary of Defense. The chiefs have obligations to Congress, the service secretaries, and

the Secretary of Defense, relationships that can give rise to competing loyalties. But there are advantages to this system. It introduces checks and balances and lets everyone have a voice. But it can get confusing with 17 four-stars around the table at a CINCs conference—that's a lot of people speaking with a lot of hats on.

JFQ Looking ahead, do we need another defense reorganization act?

Zinni I think reforms brought about under Goldwater-Nichols should be expanded to include the entire interagency community. The interagency process is antiquated—it is a difficult system that should be reshaped. We are tied to stove-piped relationships. I must do a lot of business directly with the Department of State. But there is an issue of all such coordination going through the Joint Staff or the Office of the Secretary of Defense. And who is my counterpart? Is it the ambassador to a given country or a desk officer at the State Department? How can that be if I am responsible for an entire region? It's an awkward system.

JFQ Finally, how would you transform the defense establishment?

Zinni We have to reconsider many aspects of defense. Take unified commands like CENTCOM. Perhaps there will be fewer uniformed personnel in our headquarters in the future. I envision more representation from the Department of State and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, for instance, even from nongovernmental organizations, agencies that we work with in the region. I see our headquarters resembling a multigovernmental agency that would change the way in which we do the day-to-day business of engagement. Some conflicts require multiorganizational approaches and even, at times, conflicts in which the military only has a supporting role. **JFQ**

This interview was conducted on March 19, 2000, at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.